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SUBJECT: BOSNIA- PRESIDENCY APPROVES NEW IRAQ DEPLOYMENT,
TAPS BOSNIAN SERB GENERAL AS NEW CHOD

REF: SARAJEVO 1021

Classified By: Acting DCM Michael Murphy for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) At its July 4 session, the Presidency gave final approval for the deployment of a "platoon-plus" to serve with coalition forces in Iraq for fixed-site security duties. The unit is currently scheduled to arrive in Iraq on or about August 1, and will be the first multi-ethnic operational unit deployed by the state of Bosnia overseas. The Bosnian Tri-Presidency also designated current Deputy Chief of the Joint Staff, Bosnian Serb Major General Miladin Milojcic, to succeed Lieutenant General Sifet Podzic, a Bosniak, whose term as CHOD was set to expire on July 21. Milojcic has already assumed the duties of Acting CHOD while the rest of the general officer appointments and rotations are decided by the Ministry of Defense and Presidency. Podzic, who remains on active military duty, is expected to receive an appointment as either Bosnian military representative to NATO or an Ambassadorship. Milojcic's appointment restores ethnic balance at the top of the defense leadership structure (Defense Minister Cikotic is a Bosniak), and should serve to blunt Serb critiques that defense institutions and defense reform are Bosniak-dominated and led. The deployment and appointment of general officers now require approval by both houses of Parliament. End Summary.

PRESIDENCY GIVES OKAY FOR NEW IRAQ MISSION

2. (C) At its July 4 session, the Presidency gave final approval for the deployment of a Bosnian "platoon-plus" for fixed-site security duties in Iraq. The Council of Ministers had given its legal opinion that the deployment was consistent with Bosnian law on July 3. COM action on the deployment had been pending for over four months as Prime Minister Spiric waited for legal comments from relevant ministries. The COM only took action after significant Embassy engagement to break the logjam. The 49-member unit is multi-ethnic and is currently scheduled to arrive in Iraq on or about August 1. Both houses of the Bosnian parliament must now approve the deployment. We do not anticipate any serious political opposition to the deployment, but we are concerned

that the calendar is tight. The Bosnian parliament is scheduled to take its summer recess soon, and both houses may meet only one more time before then. We will work closely with the leadership of both houses to put the deployment approval on a "fast track" before August 1. (Note. Though previous rotations of Bosnia's Explosive Ordnance Disposal unit were deployed to Iraq before the required parliamentary action, we do not know if the Ministry of Defense would do the same with the platoon-plus absent parliamentary approval. End Note.)

MILOJCIC ASSUMES CHARGE

13. (C) During its July 4 session, the Presidency also appointed current Deputy CHOD, Bosnian Serb Major General Miladin Milojcic, as Acting CHOD, formally beginning the transition of the general officer corps mandated by the expiration of former CHOD LTG Sifet Podzic's four-year term on July 21 (reftel). The Presidency instructed Defense Minister Selmo Cikotic and Milojcic to consult on further general officer appointments and rotations as mandated by the Law on Defense, and present a comprehensive proposal for the appointments to the Presidency within a week. Senior advisors to all three Presidency members told us that the entire general officer corps should be in place by July 21, and that MG Milojcic will certainly be appointed to a four-year term as CHOD. The appointments of CHOD, the two Deputy CHODs, and the Commanders of the Support and Operational Command will require parliamentary approval.

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14. (C) While there remains some latitude regarding the general officer appointments, the parameters of the transition are by and large set. Under provisions of the Law on Defense, the two DCHODs and the commanders of the Support and Operational Commands may not be of the same nationality as the CHOD. In all likelihood, the two Deputy CHODs will be the current Bosnian Croat DCHOD MG Slavko Puljic and the current Armed Forces Inspector General, BG Rizvo Pleh, a Bosniak and close Podzic friend. The current Support Command Commander, Bosnian Serb MG Dragan Vukovic, has told Cikotic that he will accept an appointment as Deputy Support Commander in the event of Milojcic assuming the CHOD post. Cikotic has told us that he intends to propose the current Fifth Brigade Commander, BG Mirsad Gutic, a Bosniak, to take over the Support Command. The Operational Command leadership under Bosnian Croat BG Ante Jelec will likely remain unchanged.

AMBASSADOR PODZIC?

15. (C) The Bosnian Tri-Presidency released CHOD LTG Sifet Podzic from duty two weeks before the mandated expiration of his four-year term in office. Senior Advisors to the Presidency members have told us that Podzic, who remains on active duty despite his transition from the CHOD post, will receive either an appointment as Bosnian military representative to NATO or an Ambassadorship. Advisors to Presidents Radmanovic and Komsic told us that despite earlier plans, an ambassadorial post is now more likely. The decision will rest with Bosniak member of the Presidency, Haris Silajdzic, who takes responsibility for the appointment of Bosniaks to diplomatic posts. We have actively engaged the Presidency to ensure that Podzic receives an appointment consistent with his high-level and successful service to the state.

COMMENT: PRESIDENCY MAKES SOLID CHOICE ON CHOD

16. (C) We have engaged the Ministry of Defense and Presidency to ensure that the CHOD transition proceeded smoothly. With that in mind, we are pleased that the Presidency seems to

have taken its responsibilities as Commander-in-Chief seriously in moving the CHOD and general officer transition forward. In making the early designation of Milojcic before the appointments of all other generals, the Presidency has encouraged a process that will promote a stable change of command for the military leadership. The appointment of a Bosnian Serb to the CHOD post also returns "balance" to the top leadership of defense institutions, and should serve to limit complaints from the Republika Srpska leadership that Serbs have been excluded from senior defense positions. Milojcic is well-known to the Embassy and has been a strong partner. He is professional and has a solid understanding of defense reform and the NATO integration process. We hope to build on our already strong relationship with him and develop the level of rapport we had with Podzic. End Comment.

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